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AUTHOR Stillion, Judith M.; McDowell, Eugene E.
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ABSTRACT

Although the sources and effects of sex role stereotyping on personal, vocational, and cultural aspects of society have been documented, little research has focused on strategies for changing stereotypic views. To investigate the effectiveness of a short, intense teaching session on sex role attitudes, 51 gifted ninth and tenth grade students participated in a 3-hour workshop. The experimental group consisted of 32 ninth graders (19 males and 13 females); the control group consisted of 19 tenth graders (8 males and 11 females). The experimental treatment included a visual exercise, slide-tape shows, and a group discussion led by both a male and a female teacher. The Attitude Toward Women Scale (AWS) was administered as a pre-, post-, and follow-up test to all participants. Results revealed that all groups showed little change in mean AWS scores from pre- to post- to follow-up testing. Scores for females stayed essentially the same, while scores for males became slightly more conservative. The findings indicated that brief modules of formal instruction by male and female teachers are ineffective in reducing sex role stereotyping among gifted adolescents. Further findings showed that the tenth grade controls were more liberal than their ninth grade counterparts. The ninth-tenth grade phenomenon and other age differences and developmental trends need further investigation. (BL)

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The Influence of a Multi-Media Presentation on Sex-Role Stereotyping in Gifted Adolescents

Judith M. Stillion and Eugene E. McDowell

Western Carolina University

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The Influence of a Multi-Media Presentation on
Sex-Role Stereotyping in Gifted Adolescents

Sex role stereotypes are defined as "the rigidly held and oversimplified beliefs that males and females, by virtue of their sex, possess distinct psychological traints and characteristics" (Basow, 1980, p. 5). Because the beliefs are oversimplified they tend not to represent individuals fairly. Because they are rigidly held they tend to restrict the individual freedom to grow for most males and females.

The effects of sex role stereotyping are widespread and damaging. Evidence exists that therapists use stereotyped standards in dealing with their clients (Brovernan, Brovernan, Clarkson, Rosencrantz, & Vogel, 1970). Stereotyped expectations may play a role in vocational counseling and career choice (Astin & Harway, 1976). This, in turn, may contribute to the sex differential in salary (Rytina, 1982). Even the seven-year sex differential in death may have some roots in cultural stereotyping (Stillion, in press).

Although many sources have been cited as feeding sex role stereotypes (e.g., parent behaviors and expectations, textbooks, television shows, toys, etc.), little has been written concerning strategies for changing stereotypic views. One study (O'neil, 1980) investigated the effects of a four-week workshop designed to reduce the effects of sexism and sex role socialization on women's career planning. Women who participated in the all-female workshop appeared to change their self-descriptions in a more masculine direction and changed their attitudes about the appropriateness of two stereotypic masculine career areas.

Given the extent of stereotyping in our society and the amount of time available to most people for education, however, four-week workshops seem to be impractical methods for changing stereotypical thinking. The present study

grew out of an early study which attempted to alter sex role attitudes by means of short but intensive teaching sessions delivered to a sample of ninth grade gifted students (Williams, 1977). Gifted students were chosen for two reasons. (1) The group was readily available and intact. They were studying cultural values. (2) The effect, if any, of a particular teaching approach should be more easily noted with gifted children than with a randomly assigned group of children.

The subjects in the Williams (1977) study were exposed to three sessions of lectures, discussion, and slide/tape presentations on sex-role stereotypes and their costs. Pre- and post tests of attitudes concerning sex-role stereotyping indicated that the subjects polarized their original views. The males became more conservative, and the females became more liberal. It was speculated that the polarization may have been influenced by the fact that the teacher was female, which might have strengthened the female subjects' identification and created resistance among the males. Also, because the curriculum was presented over three sessions, there may have been discussion and teasing among the ninth graders between sessions which led to polarization of the original attitudes.

The present study attempted to improve upon some of the design problems of the Williams (1977) study. Specifically, a male and a female served as teachers to promote identification by both sexes. Also the curriculum was presented in a single three-hour session.

Method

Subjects

Fifty-one ninth and tenth grade gifted students, who were attending a summer enrichment program on a university campus, served as subjects in the

experiment. Admission requirements for the program included scores of 130 or above on an individual intelligence test, performance at least two years above grade level on an academic achievement test, and the recommendation of their school counselor. There were 32 ninth graders, 19 males and 13 females, who served as the experimental group; and 19 tenth graders, 8 males and 11 females, who served as controls.

Procedure

The experimental group was given a three-hour presentation designed to reduce sex-role stereotyping, while the control group received no treatment. The experimental treatment included a visualization exercise in which images of various occupational groups were developed and discussed from a sex-role stereotyping perspective. Subjects were shown two slide/tape shows which depicted sex-role stereotypes for males and females in advertising through pictures and appropriate theme music. There was a discussion of the psychological problems inherent in the stereotypes illustrated and a debate concerning the relative costs of sex-role stereotypes for men and women. The male presenter took the position that the cost of stereotyping is greater for females while the female presenter took the opposite position. Students were encouraged to interact with the presenters throughout the three hours.

The Attitude Toward Women Scale (AWS) was administered to the experimental and control subjects in pre-, post-, and follow up testing sessions. The tests were given by a confederate of the experimenters one week before the treatment, immediately following the presentation, and one week later. The tests were given in a totally different context which, as indicated in the follow up questioning, the subjects did not associate with the treatment.

Results

Mean pre-, post-, and follow up test scores on the Attitude Toward Women Scale (AWS) are presented in Table 1. It can be seen in Table 1 that the tenth grade controls were more liberal in their attitudes toward women than the ninth grade experimental Ss (higher scores indicate more liberal attitudes). It can be seen in Table 1 also that female Ss were more liberal than male Ss in both the experimental and control groups. All groups showed little change in mean AWS scores from pre- to post- to follow up testing. Scores for females stayed essentially the same, while scores for males became slightly more conservative.

Insert Table 1 about here

The mean AWS scores were compared using a 2 x 2 x 3 ANOVA design with repeated measures on the third variable. The between groups variables included the experimental and control groups (9th and 10th graders) and sex of Ss. The within groups variable included pre-, post-, and follow up test scores on each subject. The difference between mean scores for experimental and control Ss was significant ($F = 4.64$, $df = 1/47$, $p<.05$). The difference between mean scores for males and females was significant also ($F = 5.99$, df 1/47, $p<.05$). There were, however, no significant differences among mean pre-, post-, and follow up test scores. Also, there were no significant interaction effects.

Discussion

The findings clearly indicate that brief modules of formal instruction by male and female teachers are ineffective in reducing sex role stereotyping among gifted adolescents. Inasmuch as these data constitute a replication of the findings of the Williams (1977) study with adjustments to increase the likeli-

hood of a treatment effect, the no-treatment effect results appear to be all the more reliable.

The finding that females are more liberal than males in sex role attitudes is consistent with those of the Williams (1977) study. The negative results for treatment and interaction effects may have been partially influenced by the fact that the pretest scores for females were high enough to have created a ceiling effect for that group.

While mean AWS scores for females remained essentially unchanged through pre-, post-, and follow up testing, scores for males became more conservative. Data analysis showed a suggestive but non-significant interaction between sex of Ss and testing session ($F = 1.72$, df 2/22, $p<.19$). The fact that scores for both experimental and control males became more conservative suggests that the attitude polarization phenomenon discussed by Tesser and Conlee (1975) may have been operating. Tesser and Conlee have found that giving subjects opportunity to think about existing attitudes tends to result in polarization. That is to say, giving male ninth and tenth grade boys opportunity to think about initially conservative sex role attitudes over three testings at one-week intervals may have had a polarizing effect.

The use of tenth grade gifted students as controls resulted in the serendipitous finding that they are more liberal in sex role attitudes than ninth graders. These findings suggest further research to replicate the ninth-tenth grade phenomenon and to explore other age differences and developmental trends.

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Table 1

Mean Pre-, Post-, and Follow up AWS Test Scores

for Male and Female Ninth and Tenth Graders

Groups	Pre	Post	Follow up
Experimental (9th Grade)			
Male	50.31	47.79	46.05
Female	54.00	54.54	53.38
Control (10th Grade)			
Male	55.25	52.00	48.50
Female	59.55	59.36	59.73